

North Bi Northwest

October/November 1991

The Newsletter of the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network,
a member project of Gay Community Social Services

Volume 4, Number 5

The sweet bi and bi: Male-female couples in the bisexual world

by Kathleen Bennett

You're walking down the street with your girlfriend and you see them coming towards you, a man and a woman, holding hands. Pretty soon, you figure out that they're not straight. The woman gives you the same smile of recognition that you would be seeing if she were with her girlfriend. The man is dressed a little too flamboyantly to blend in on fraternity row. You smile back, partners in queerness, thinking, "Oh! They're bisexual."

Why Do Bi's Fall In Love?

Whether we were waiting around for Ms. or Mr. Right, or just happened to be in the right place at the right time, bisexual people generally tend to form romantic partnerships with whomever we choose (and who chooses us), for our own reasons. Social pressure seems to be less of a consideration for us than in main-



stream heterosexual society. The character traits and personality "vibes" of our potential lovers mean more to us than do received notions of what's supposed to fit

where and why. According to Ron Fox, a bisexual counselor who has been compiling data from surveys distributed throughout the bisexual community, it is not the case that bisexuals predominantly tend to pair up with other bisexuals. However, "the sweet bi and bi" is a prevalent enough phenomenon to warrant a closer look. I used to think I was unusual in being paired with a bisexual man, and considered myself specially gifted with the creativity and understanding that this connection provided. As I become more and more aware of my community, though, I see bi couples wherever I look, and am always discovering more.

When we couple, we do so with the
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Curious Forum planned

The collective memory of Seattle area bi groups paints a curious picture of the larger sexual minority community's attitude toward bi's. Has the community denied us inclusion in the past? Is getting bi added to the title of the annual Pride events possible? Do local gay and lesbian leaders know that bisexuals have been in their organizations for years? Do they care?

We hope to have a chance to find some answers at SBMU's October 13 topic meeting. The concept is a forum creating a dialog between Seattle's lesbian and gay community and bi activists, providing us with an opportunity to address our issues in a positive way. Some of the groups that Dale Nelson and Kitt Gassman of SBMU, and Joan Faber, of SBWN, have contacted include the Lesbian Resource Center, Seattle Gay News, the National Leather Association, ACT-UP! and Queer Nation. The meeting will be held from 3 to 5 pm in order to avoid conflicting with that evening's SBWN meeting.

We don't see this as a hot seat for attacking the local gay and lesbian community, but rather an attempt to continue the dialog begun by SBWN's bi forum held two years ago. If we are successful the forum could be repeated in the spring with more elaborate planning.

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North Bi Northwest

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SBWN Coordinating Committee

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SBWN Statement of Purpose

We are a group of feminists working to create a bisexual support network and to promote equality for bisexual people in both the heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities. We regard ourselves as part of the larger sexual minority community, and consider the fight for lesbian/gay rights to be our own. We are dedicated to the right of all people to define their own

sexuality, free from any social, political or economic coercion. We seek to provide a safe place for women to explore all aspects of their sexuality. All women are welcome to attend SBWN activities. While we work with men on issues of common interest, our group is exclusively female to keep the concerns of women in the forefront of our work.

The discrimination we face as women and as sexual minorities is only one facet of oppression: all bigotry is our enemy. We stand behind the racial and ethnic liberation movements and the struggle for economic equality. However, in any work we do, feminism and the interests of women will be our central concern.

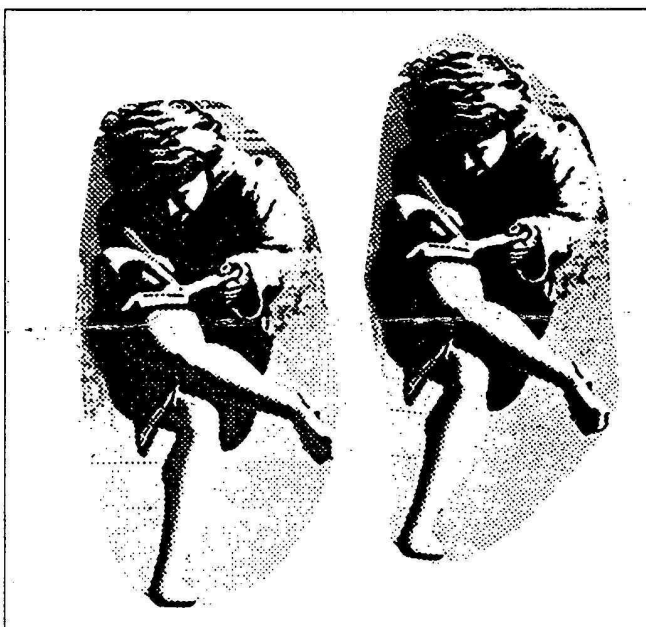
Coming out bi in the lesbian community: my experience

Opinion ➤ by Tamara Bower

I first came out in 1977 at the age of 20, and I came out as a bisexual. That was the word that seemed best to express my feelings. I had no idea that it wasn't cool to use it among lesbians. Actually, I didn't know any lesbians then, nor any bisexuals either. I was in school and I was hanging out with leftists and art students and experimenting with multiple relationships, mostly with men. I very badly wanted to have relationships with women too, but almost all the women I knew were heterosexual. I was naively idealistic about free love. I seriously underestimated my own capacity for jealousy and competitiveness. I threatened, and was threatened by, the women I knew by sleeping with the same men they were, and then I scared them even more by wanting to sleep with them too. I did have a couple of brief sexual relationships with women. But I was frustrated and began to feel more and more that I needed to find lesbians. I was also getting angrier and angrier over the sexism of the men I was involved with.

When I graduated from college in 1979 I moved to New York. I immediately became involved with lesbian communities. I found out quickly that I had better not call myself bisexual, or tell anyone that I had had sexual feelings for men. But I was so angry at men that I didn't think I wanted to sleep with them anymore anyway. At this point, I began to identify as a lesbian.

I talked to my first lover in New York about some of my awful experiences with male lovers. She asked me: "So you're going to give up men just like that? You're never going to sleep with men again?" I thought that she was being supportive—I said "Oh, I don't know, maybe someday, I don't think about it ..." Then she got angry and said that she didn't trust bisexuals and that "All you want is a big fat dick! How 'bout it? Two inches thick ..." I was shocked. (And I hadn't



been asking her to use a dildo or anything.) When I confronted her with her vulgarity and her accusations, she apologized and explained how insecure she felt over whether she herself was a "real" lesbian, and that she needed to know that her lover was a real lesbian. She told me that she had had a boyfriend and was upset that it didn't work out, and she expressed envy that I was able to have relationships with men. Then she broke off the relationship with me.

I was very insecure myself, and so I learned to hide and to lie about my past. I got the message that if I had ever had any sexual feelings for men at all that it meant that my love for women was inauthentic. I hated myself for having had feelings for men and blamed my oppression as a woman on my own feelings: I imagined that if I had been a lesbian all along I would not have allowed myself to be abused by men. Nor would I have hurt other women through jealousy and competitiveness over men. In my inexperience, I idealized lesbian relationships. It took me some time to realize that problems such as jealousy and competitiveness are just as common among lesbians as anyone else. In the meantime, I worried a

lot that there was something horribly wrong with me. I'm sure that this contributed to my difficulty in finding a lover.

During this time I was briefly a member of a lesbian anti-racist group. It was my first political group and I was quiet and shy. One meeting we received a letter from Janine, who explained that she was dropping out of the group because she had fallen in love with a man. When we started to discuss this, another woman, Kate, spoke up and announced that she was bisexual and lived with a man.

Everyone jumped on her: What are you doing in this group? Why didn't you tell us this before? She tried to defend herself by

saying that she really wanted a woman lover and that the details of her personal life were nobody's business. Everyone was arguing with her. Then Ellen spoke up. We were all surprised by what she said. "What do lesbians do? Do lesbians sleep with men? I don't know, I don't know what lesbians do." Ellen had been a hard-core separatist. This was quite a reversal for her.

I was friendly to Kate and went out with her for coffee afterward and listened to her and talked. I told her that I used to be bisexual and that bisexuality didn't work and that she should give up on men.

The next meeting we had was a formal discussion and vote on whether Kate, as a bisexual, could remain a member. Kate had brought a friend with her for support, a woman she had slept with. Most of the lesbians in the group were very hostile toward Kate at this meeting, so it was understandable that she wanted to bring a friend with her.

One lesbian asked, pointing at Kate's friend, "What's this? Proof?" Almost everyone spoke against bisexuality and against Kate remaining a member. Kate was in tears. She insisted that her desire

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Coming out as bi in a lesbian community

continued from page 3



for a woman lover was sincere. She said "What are you afraid of? That a bunch of straight women are going to invade this group? I don't see any straight women ready to invade!"

Then I spoke and I said bisexuals have heterosexual privilege and that a bisexual will always move to preserve her privileges. I said, "You don't even realize you are doing it." Then I burst into tears and said "I feel so guilty about what I've done..." When I started to cry, Kate looked at me hopefully, thinking this would mean that I would support her. But I wiped my eyes and said that I would also vote for her expulsion.

Almost everyone voted for Kate to be expelled except for Jenny, who said "I trust Kate; I'd be happy to work with her." Another woman, Diane, was about to vote against Kate, but then stopped herself and said that she would vote on behalf of Ellen, who hadn't come to this meeting. Diane was impressed with Ellen's rejection of separatism.

Diane's lover, Brenda, was especially hard on Kate, and hard on bisexuality and on anyone who was having trouble coming out. And she was quite snotty toward heterosexual women. Years later, I saw Diane on the street and I greeted her and asked her about Brenda. Diane said with tight lips: "She became straight." She was obviously very upset about it. I didn't ask her any details.

I was torn up and confused about kicking Kate out of this group. And I wasn't really connecting with the politics of this group anyway. I quit a couple of

weeks after this meeting.

About a year or so after I quit this group, I met a man at my job, Paul. I got to know him slowly over almost a year. He was good looking and talented and really loved my artwork and encouraged me. I needed this support very badly then, and I was very lonely too. I couldn't help but to fall in love with him.

When this happened, half of my lesbian friends denounced me as a traitor. (And almost all of my friends were lesbian then.) What I really didn't expect was that the other half responded, "Oh, that's no big deal. I sleep with men sometimes." (!) None of them had told me this before. I thought—there is something going on, and nobody is talking about it. *Everyone is pretending that this isn't happening.*

Let me describe different lesbians' reactions to my relationship with Paul. My friend Susan was one of the most angry with me. Susan's anger stemmed from the fact that she had been heterosexual, and had decided that lesbianism was a solution to her problems with men. If I were calling myself bisexual, maybe that would mean that she was bisexual too, and her politics would not allow her to admit that. She said that because all of her relationships with men had been abusive, it was not possible for me or for any other woman to have a healthy relationship with a man. By this she inadvertently expressed that she was threatened by the possibility that I could be happy with a man.

Patricia, who had been my lover briefly, was the opposite. She was totally homosexual and had never felt any attraction to men at all. That I could feel sexual with a man bewildered her. It was something outside her experience. And she was furious about it. Earlier I had made plans to visit her and I followed through on those plans. We spent almost the whole weekend arguing about my sexuality. I still loved her. I was explaining, apologizing and crying. She had been the one to turn me down in favor of another lover, but it didn't matter, she was furious. At one point she said, "It's so hard to be gay. I can't understand why someone

who is straight would want to be gay." And she said, "Lesbians have the right to protect themselves"—by breaking off their relationships with bisexual women.

Our friendship was strained and broken, but months later she wrote me a very moving letter and apologized. She said she had no right to judge me and affirmed that my friendship was important to her. I was so happy.

Another lesbian friend, Kim, I had known at my job. She was friends with Paul. When I told her about my relationship with him, she got angry and broke off her friendship with me, but continued to be friendly with him! Later, when I was having problems with Paul and he started to date another woman, he told Kim about it. Kim said to a mutual friend, "Paul is a real man, and he wants a real woman. He won't put up with this bisexual shit!" That was not the problem, but even if it was! (Do I have to explain how sexist this is?) Paul was not supportive to me in this situation either, to say the least.

One more lesbian I'll mention, Clara, was friends with a male-to-female transsexual who identified as a lesbian. That she would accept this person as a lesbian and not me, I found particularly insulting. Her reasoning was that the transsexual had given up her heterosexual privilege and I had not.

Let me make a comparison here. When I was in high school, I had a boyfriend my parents did not like. They pressured me and punished me and did everything they could to get me to break up with him. This only made me more stubborn in my resolve to see him whenever possible. Then I had an art teacher who encouraged me and really took me seriously. She didn't know anything about my boyfriend or my personal life. But because she gave me so much support on something important to me, I began to take myself seriously, and when I did, I saw that this guy was in my way. That's when I broke up with him.

So often, lesbians (and others for that matter) treat me the way my parents did, trying to run my life by their standards, instead of giving me the real

support I need for the things that *are* important.

Looking back on all this, it becomes clear that people who attacked my sexuality were expressing insecurities about their own sexuality.

NYC Bi Women's Network

In Spring of 1983 I started a consciousness-raising group for bisexual women. I put an ad in a feminist newspaper, and I called some friends. Kate was one of the first women I called. There were nine of us and we met through the summer.

During this time, I saw a letter in *Gay Community News* (1) written by a group of bisexual women in Boston called the BiVocals. It was a powerful letter and I was impressed. I wrote to them. They had their own CR group and were starting a network of bisexual women's groups. It sounded so exciting. I wanted something like this in New York. I kept in touch with them, and I proposed to our CR group that we start a bisexual women's network like the one in Boston.

Our first open meeting was in October 1983. Fifty women showed up. We passed out the letter by the BiVocals and talked about our desire to start a network here. We talked about our CR group and our problems with lesbian chauvinism. Kate talked about the terrible meeting that she and I had been through. Then we went around the room and each woman talked about why she had come and what she wanted from a network. There were heterosexual women who were just coming out; women who had been lesbians for years and were now involved with men and everything in between. Many women expressed pain and anger at lesbian chauvinism.

One woman I particularly remember. She defended the lesbian-feminist line — that you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist, that sleeping with men is a sell-out to the patriarchy, etc.—and then her voice cracked and she broke into tears to confess that she had been feeling attracted to a man. She was filled with self-hatred and guilt over this. I regret so that I did not speak personally to her afterward, she

was in such pain. I never saw her again.

We organized women at the meeting into CR support groups. I know that one of these groups met for five years. And we also set up a planning committee to plan more meetings and social events. We had open meetings every two months to introduce new women into the network, and to set up new support groups. We had social events in between these big meetings, and sent out a short newsletter. We had a contingent in the Lesbian & Gay Pride March. We called ourselves NYC Bi Women. We quickly built our mailing list to three hundred.

We had our first open meeting in a small lesbian theatre space where I was a volunteer. I went to a planning meeting of this theatre to arrange for a second meeting of our bisexual network. One of the founders of the theatre, Pam, became hostile toward me. She said, "I don't want any political groups meeting here. Art and politics are two different things!" She pointed at our poster on the wall, which said BISEXUAL WOMEN in bold letters and she said, "Every time I look at that it makes me want to puke!" Her twenty-year-old daughter came in then and Pam said derisively, "Hey, we got a meeting for you to go to!" and shoved one of our flyers into her hand — her daughter crumpled it up and threw it on the floor.

It hurt me so much to have this talented woman I admired viciously attack me in front of the whole collective. I became frozen and unable to speak. Another bisexual woman from my CR group was there and she didn't say anything in my support either. Other women, whom I didn't know very well, spoke up in my defense, saying, "It's not a political group, it's just a CR group, there's no reason why they can't use the space."

We used the theatre one more time, and then fortunately, we were able to get a bigger room at New York University. And we needed a bigger space too; our meetings were growing. In October, 1984, we had a one-year anniversary of NYC Bi Women. It was then that I had an opportunity to leave the country for one year. We

had a planning committee of at least six women, one of whom was already taking on leadership responsibilities. I remember handing her the mailing list before I left; she made a sweet comment about "passing on the flame".

Sometime while I was gone, the Network fell apart. I was told that all of the work fell onto the shoulders of this one woman, and that she burnt out. When she quit, no one else kept the group going.

When I returned to New York, a mixed group for bisexual women and men had started. I participated in this for awhile, but a group that included men didn't appeal to me so much. I believe that many other women felt this way, because this group never became as large as the one we had for women.

I waited six years for someone else to start a group for bisexual women. I finally gave up on waiting and started another group for bisexual women in New York in January 1991. We have been meeting twice a month. I am making an effort to both minimize and equalize the workload. We became part of the New York Area Bisexual Network.

Though I received strong support from both women and men, there was also some initial resistance to a women-only group, which included rumors that I was "out to destroy" the other group and that I was "really a lesbian." So I heard from a couple of sources. I also received an anonymous phone call from a man to this effect. I had to laugh at the idea of bisexual men calling me a lesbian after all of the rejection I've gotten from lesbians. Obviously this reflects fear of women's autonomy as well as homophobia. Generally, though, there is goodwill and mutual support between the women's groups and other groups in NYABN.

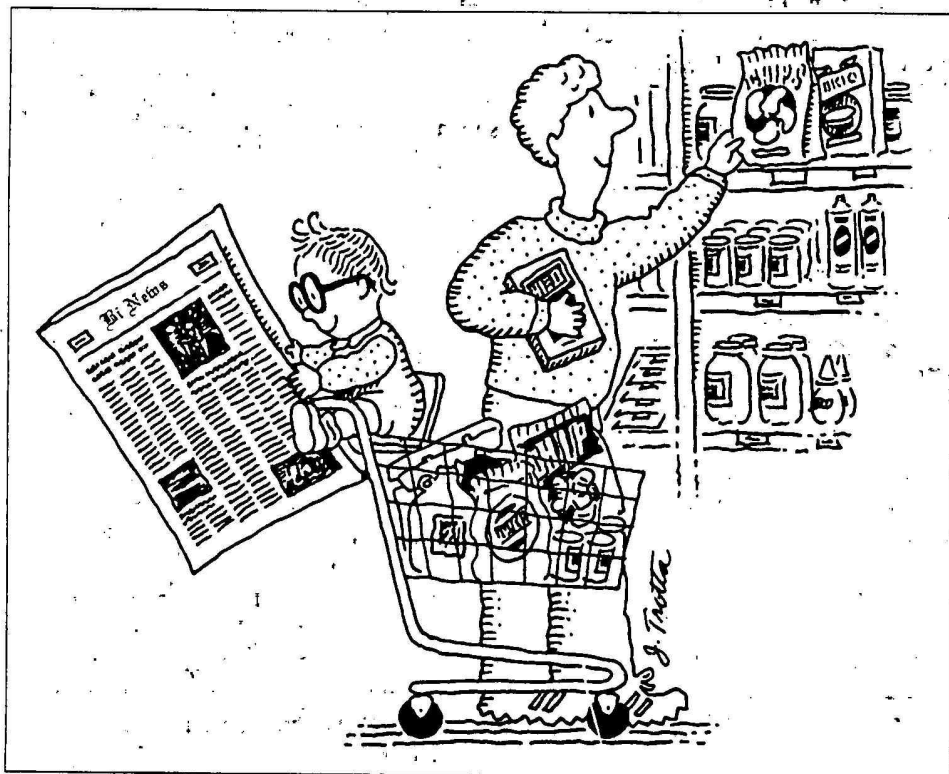
Part two of this article will appear in the next issue of North Bi Northwest.

Some of the names in this article have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved.

1 April 23, 1983. This letter is also reproduced in *Bi Any Other Name; Bisexual People Speak Out* edited by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, Alyson Publications, Boston. 1991.

Bi News

compiled by Erica Avery



Exercise your bi-ing power:

Shocking Gray Corporation is presenting a new catalog targeted for "the other 25 million Americans," the long-ignored gay and lesbian population. Shocking Gray hopes to tap into gay and lesbian spending power by offering this venue for gay and lesbian businesses to display their products, and by offering consumers the opportunity to deal with businesses that respect their lifestyle as well as their dollars. A percentage of revenues from catalog sales will be donated to gay and lesbian causes such as AIDS and political lobbying groups. The primary market for this catalog is gays and lesbians, but we're sure we'll find plenty of bi-products in its pages. For a free copy of the premier issue (available in late October), write to:

Shocking Gray
c/o Mailing List Manager
4901 Broadway #152
San Antonio, TX 78209

Bisexual Fiction Anthology

A call for submissions. Submissions of

up to 6,000 words are being accepted through March 1992 for the first anthology of bisexual fiction. For information, send an SASE to

ANTHOLOGY
463 Hanover Ave
Oakland, CA 94606.

Call for essays on the politics of Bisexuality. Bisexual activists Naomi Tucker and Brad Robinson are seeking essays for an anthology to examine how our sexuality and our politics have converged to form who we are and how we look at the world. This book is the next logical step in a progression of recently published bisexual anthologies. We want to collect the voices of women and men who are creating and defining bisexual politics. We especially encourage those whose voices have been traditionally silenced or censored to submit writing that speaks to your personal experience. Submissions can be sent on disk (Macintosh or IBM compatible), or as double-spaced, typewritten manu-

scripts, by November 1, 1991, to:

Bisexual Politics
584 Castro Street #136
San Francisco, CA 94114

For more information, contact Brad at 415/826-5788 or Naomi at 415/553-7725.

Don't forget-Friday, October 11 is *National Coming Out Day*. And mark your calendars for February so you can Bi Out those Valentine's card stores for *Bisexual Visibility Day*!

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services convened the Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Concerns on August 22 in Olympia. Over the next year task force members will be working together to learn more about the attitudes and specific needs of clients being served by the agency as well as DSHS staff. Client issues, employee issues, and resource identification will each be dealt with by a specific work group. YOU can join in the effort by working as a group member. Written comments are also welcome if you are unable to participate in a work group. In addition, community meetings open to the public will be held sometime in the future. For more information on how to get involved, contact:

Douglas North
DSHS Office of Planning
P.O. Box 45201
Olympia, WA 98540
206/753-0800 or
SCAN 234-0800

Fed up and can't take it

anymore? The (Bisexual) Grassroots Action Network (GAN) is collecting "thoughts, ideas, beliefs, wants, etc." to create a "Manifesto of Beliefs and Actions that each of us can commit to and live by." Correspondence will be received until October 1992. Send your "creative/action statements" to:

Terry Johnson PhD
P.O. Box 91862
Long Beach, CA 90809-1862

Bicentrism is a term coined by Bisexual Activists in the D.C. area, and refers to an approach to building a Bisexual Movement according to bicentrists. It differs from "Pansexuality," which embraces all sexual minorities, e.g.; Bondage and Discipline enthusiasts, swingers, transsexuals (and presumably flute-playing men who are part goat). The Pansexual strategy is to form a large alliance by including victims of all forms of sexual oppression, and the goal is to demand respect for the diversity of sexual preferences.

Bicentrism also differs from the "Les-Bi-Gay" model (with its appropriate double entendre), which views Bi interests as nearly identical to Lesbian and Gay concerns. "Les-Bi-Gay" organizations mimic and even join those of the gay and lesbian community, for their goal is to unite all three groups in a queer community.

Bicentrism, in contrast, asserts that bisexuality should operate from a moderate and centrist viewpoint so as not to alienate groups on the Right or the Left. Bicentrists feel ignored by both the gay and the straight worlds and feel they need a place of their own and a caring environment. They see no need to put energy into recruiting other sexual minorities to accept and join Bis, when our numbers are large enough to build our very own national movement. They see efforts to persuade lesbians and gay to include Bis as wasted, when with our own movement we could serve as their allies rather than as second-class citizens within their ranks.

Bicentrism encourages identification as Bi and development of a unique Bi vantage point in human society. For a free packet of information about a new, national, bicentrist organization that will begin operation in Washington, D.C. within the next six months, write:

Bicentrist Info
BiNetwork
P.O. Box 254
Washington, D.C. 20013-2254

(Synopsis of an article by Robin Elizabeth Margolis and Gar Warren Young, published in Side Bi Side, the Newsletter of the Bi Network of the Washington, D.C. area, July/August/September 1991.)

The Fourth Sager

Symposium on Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Studies, subtitled "Constructions of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Identities in Popular Media" will be held March 27-29, 1992 at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

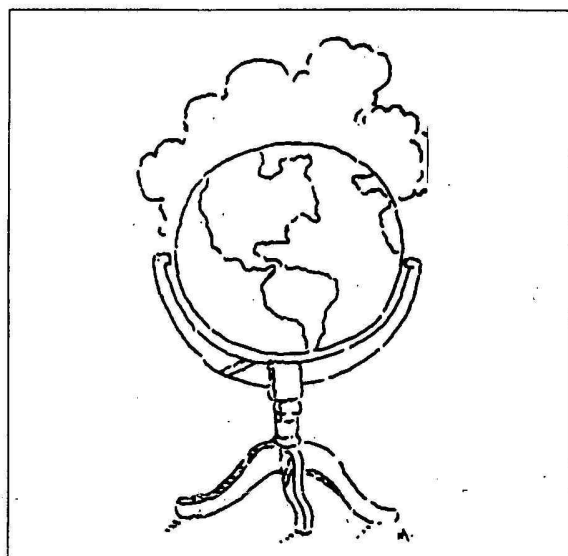
This symposium is often used as a testing ground for the new theories presented at the larger academic "Fifth Annual Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference," held this year at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In addition to choosing an inclusive title, the organizers of the symposium have explicitly encouraged submissions of studies pertaining to bisexuality. Advisory committee member Danny Smartt said of the move, "We took a good look at the issues surrounding the Rutgers Conference [which removed the b-word from its title after the word's first inclusion at the Fourth Annual Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Conference at Harvard last October] and (the committee) decided a statement needed to be made."

The range of topics at the symposium is expected to be expansive and not limited to contemporary American Culture. Papers on bisexual identities are especially encouraged. Send abstracts to:

Sager Fund Advisory Committee
Daniel Smartt, Art Dept
Swarthmore College
500 College Avenue
Swarthmore, PA 19081-1397

Deadline: November 20, 1991

It's probably too late to hop a plane and catch the first ever International Bisexual Conference on October 4 and 5 at Vrije University in Amsterdam, but



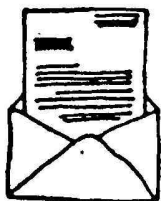
we'll have eyewitness reports in the next issue of *North Bi Northwest*. Large contingents from Boston and San Francisco attended, and they've promised to tell us what it was like.

Lesbians who sleep with men; Loraine Hutchins, co-editor of *Bi Any Other Name*, has strong opinions on the use of these words. "It shows me there's a lot of hypocrisy and denial going on," she says. "There's a way in which the lesbian identity is being so deified that we're not allowing room for anything else to come into existence on an equal par or even as an interesting possibility next to and just as respectable as."

She supports a person's right to claim whatever identity she chooses, but states, "If we continue to talk about 'lesbians who sleep with men' without looking at it in the context of bisexuality we're only telling part of the truth...The lesbian community, the gay community...are so under fire right now and so threatened that I don't want to add to that. I want to find a way to affirm lesbian identity and lesbian separatism in a functional way...and still discuss these issues. I don't see a need to have it be an either-or thing." She also states, "Heterosexism needs homosexuality-as-a-class to exist. When gays and lesbians support this either-or mentality, they are supporting the good/bad, subject/object structures of patriarchy."

Quoted in *Outlines*, the Voice of the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Community, August 1991.

Letters



Dear North Bi Northwest Readers:

This morning I went to the Fremont vintage clothing and furniture store, DeLuxe Junk. I arrived before the store opened and sat down outside to wait. Several other people, including a white man who cleans for the owners, and a woman of color, formed a small crowd outside the building. The man began to describe (very loudly) a confrontation he'd had with a black man in which he'd threatened to beat the black man with a stick (he brandished his walking stick to demonstrate).

"I'd have beat him to a pulp, but I have a conscience," he boasted, and elaborated at some length on how effectively he would have done so. Then he launched into a tirade against blacks, making unbelievable racist statements about black men, women and children, and using derogatory, insulting language. I grew increasingly angry, but hesitated to confront him as he was loud and belligerent and a lot bigger than me. Finally, he changed the subject and lowered his voice.

When the owners arrived and opened the store, I went quietly to the front counter to register my distress. I told one of owners about the incident, and that the man had made his connection to the store clear and that his behavior reflected badly on the store. He told me that he had no control over what the man said, which I expected, but I wasn't prepared for both owners to turn and attack me. They were hostile and abusive, interrupting all my attempts to have a rational conversation with them. I was told that I should be ashamed of myself and should learn to be more tolerant. "Of racism?" I asked incredulously. "What if I'd been a black customer?" (I'm white). They said I wasn't being realistic. I finally left the store without buying what I'd come for. They yelled after me to take my business elsewhere.

Maybe I'm NOT being realistic, but I

was stunned to encounter such blatant, aggressive racism in the heart of Seattle's most notoriously radical business district. I was also astonished by the antagonistic attitude of these business owners towards a well-intentioned customer. I assumed they'd *want* to know that they were discouraging my patronage, and would appreciate an opportunity to correct the problem instead of losing business.

Instead, they made it clear that racism is welcome in their store, while challengers of it are not. I trust *North bi Northwest* readers will act accordingly.

Morgan

Dear Editor:

I decided to write you to thank you for the impact that your publication has had on me. While at the Pride Rally I grabbed the newsletter for my best friend. We had discussed her feelings of alienation within both the hetero and lesbian communities, and I thought the emergence of a visible bisexual community would encourage her. I identify myself as gay, so I didn't think it would answer a need in me. After reading the articles I realized that I relate to a lot of the issues more than I had imagined.

I realized that I still have a lot of issues to deal with regarding sexuality. Attraction to women plays only a minor part in my sexuality, so when I went up to the table to get a look at the literature I felt embarrassed that I "wasn't really bisexual."

Some of the articles hit a note reminding me of the turmoil over my sexual identity as a youth. If I found a woman attractive I would think, "See, I must be straight, I am interested in a woman." What I thought was that attraction to men must have just been hero worship or male bonding. When I found a man attractive my perspective changed to, "I obviously have been trying to fool myself, I am undeniably interested in this man. I must have just been appreciating women's beauty for aesthetic reasons, without passion; I must be gay." I thought I had to be exclusively one or the other, and when I became sexually active with men I thought that answered my questions.

I am beginning to think again. My

friend is fairly equal in her attraction to men and women and I accept her bisexuality as natural and perhaps even ideal, but I have been second-guessing myself. I have been denying my feelings and trying to fit them within a label. I discovered that I am embarrassed to identify myself as bisexual to the gay/lesbian community because I will be perceived as playing straight during a transition to homosexuality. I don't feel valid identifying myself as bisexual with bisexual persons because my attraction is most frequently to men. I am reluctant to say I am bi to straight people because of the misconception that lesbian/gay people choose their sexuality. I feel if they are just learning about me being gay they will not understand why I didn't just decide to be straight. Reading your publication has prompted me to work on the next step in accepting myself for how I am.

I will work on accepting my feelings without questioning them. I will have pride in the diversity of humanity and confidence in my validity within that variety.

Thank you,
Brian Vichorek

Dear North Bi Northwest

Hello again from New Zealand. It was good to see one of the Wellington Bi Women's Group advertising fliers in your August/September issue.

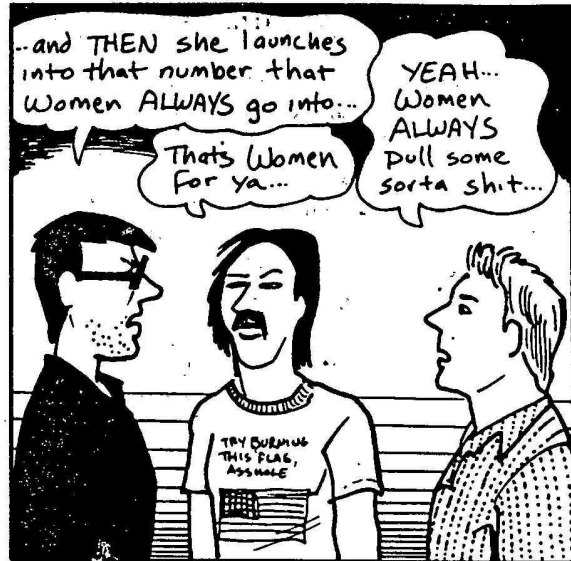
You commented on the word "koha" so I thought I would let you know what it is. Koha is a Maori word. The Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. Traditionally, koha refers to the gift presented by a visiting tribe to a host tribe. The Bisexual Women's Group uses the word to refer to the donation of money we make to the YWCA for use of their premises.

I might add that our bisexual network is predominantly "Pakeha", ie non-indigenous people. There are Maori lesbian networks, but no Maori bisexual groups that I am aware of.

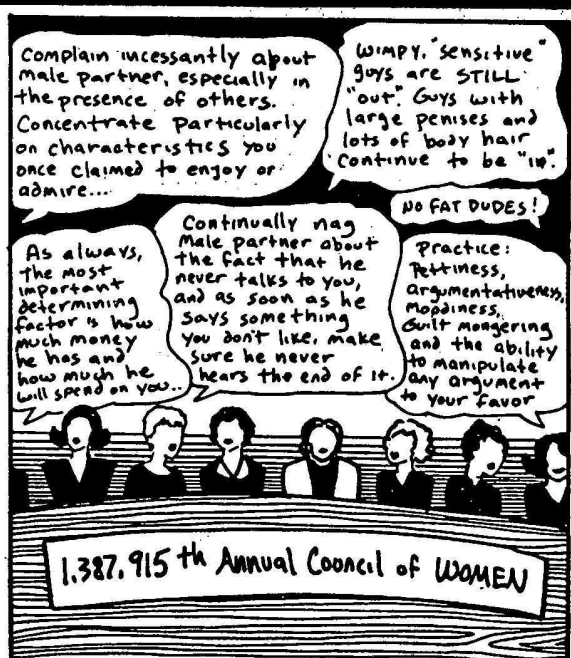
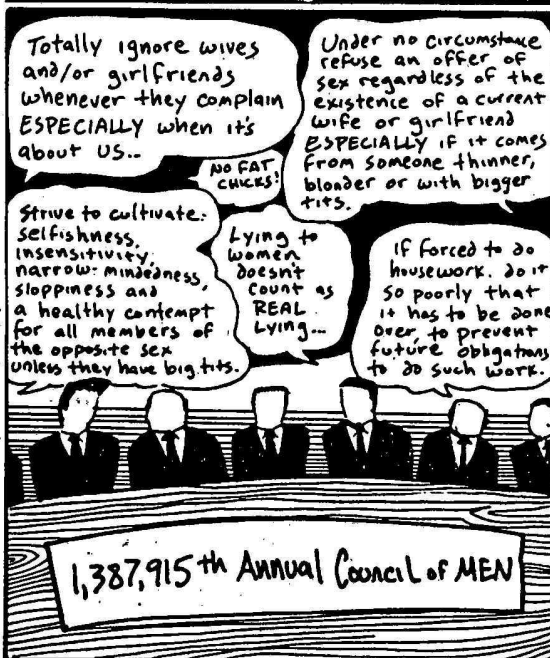
Keep up the good work with your newsletter.

Diane Suggate
for the Wellington Group

"MEN" & "WOMEN"



WHERE DO GENERALIZATIONS LIKE THESE COME FROM? THERE ACTUALLY ARE YEARLY MEETINGS WHERE REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH GENDERS ESTABLISH OFFICIAL POLICY.



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YOU SAY YOU'RE NOT LIKE THIS? NOBODY ASKED YOUR OPINION? UNFORTUNATELY, THESE ARE GROWN-UP VERSIONS OF THOSE "POPULAR" KIDS BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL WHO WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU, AND EVEN LESS NOW THAT YOU'RE A GEEKY COMIC-BOOK READER...

Bi writers getting organized

by ben e factory

Looking for new bi lit and wondering where it will come from? Clues...Twenty four bi writers gathered for a weekend August 9-11 at a Bay Area youth hostel just off the ocean beach. We got to know each other and discussed topics from politics and the social construction of gender, to erotica and science fiction. We did readings, circulated our writings, 'zines, and calls for submissions (!?), and exchanged feedback, support, inspiration and challenges.

Several projects were presented during the weekend: three anthologies (one on bi politics, one on bi fiction, one on bi men's issues—hopefully a fine companion volume to the bi feminist women's collection being finished by Beth Reba Weise; *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*), and several magazines, one of which, *Anything That Moves* (ATM) specifically focusses on bi material.

The bi politics anthology is being coordinated by Naomi Tucker and Brad Robinson (see *Bi News*), and the bi fiction anthology by Beth Elliott of Oakland and Seattle local Kory Martin-Damon (contact through SBMU at 720-4506).

The bi men's anthology is being organized by Drew Lewis (c/o the Boston Bisexual Men's Network, 338 Newbury St, 202C, Boston, MA 02115). ATM, which is a quarterly, can be subscribed and or submitted to c/o Bay Area Bisexual Network, 2402 California St, #24, San Francisco, CA 94115. ATM is also available at Beyond the Closet, Left Bank Books and Red & Black Books locally for \$6 per issue.

Two writers groups were started out of this weekend get-together, one in Seattle and one in San Francisco. Both have recently held their first meetings. The group in Seattle will meet October 19, November 16 and December 14, all Saturdays, each time at 2 pm. Call 720-4506 for location.

Bi Trek lives!

The fall season of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" will introduce gay and lesbian characters as ordinary citizens of the 24th-century world of the Starship *Enterprise*. Their sexual orientation will be presented as a matter of public indifference; glimpses of two women holding hands, for example, will raise not an eyebrow. "Viewers will see more of shipboard life in some episodes, which will, among other things, include gay crew members in day-to-day circumstances," said Gene Rodenberry, the show's creator. This no-big-deal attitude is a refreshing change from how gay people are usually portrayed on TV (when we are portrayed at all), and is sure to thrill lots of Trek devotees, as well as win the show some new fans. Said executive producer Rick Berman, "We agree that dealing with this issue is an important thing to do."



Who are the people in your neighborhood? The women of SBWN on a fine summer's Sunday at meeting.

New mutual efforts in DC bi group

by Michael Beers

Local bisexual leaders met recently in an unprecedented effort to bridge the differences that have split the DC community. There was heartfelt sharing about the pain of past misunderstandings and conflict. All felt a need to provide both inclusive and safe space for local bisexual people and to make strong efforts to meet the needs of people of color. One result of this meeting was the resignation of the two co-coordinators of the BiNetwork as of August 31. Their work has been much appreciated.

A quick assessment of our community reveals an explosion in the number of activities for Bisexuals. The Bisexual Network sustains men's, women's, mixed, feminist, youth, and creative support groups. BiWays has new leadership that has infused new energy into its women's and mixed rap groups. A Bifriendly, held every Tuesday, now routinely attracts 15 people.

New and resurrected efforts are beginning. The first HIV/Bisexual Project is under way with grant proposals being submitted. A BICEP/BIPOL DC had its founding meeting September 21. New efforts to form Jewish and people of color support/social groups, and 12-step programs have begun. The Newsletter in its new enlarged format is expanding in circulation and meeting the community's needs as a communication nerve center.

How these different groups will interact is unclear as the BiNetwork reorganizes itself. However, folks are upbeat.... For now, DC is the place to be...unless, of course, you are somewhere else.

Bi men becoming organized

by Dale Nelson

SBMU is growing and changing. We have more members and a bit more money following July's national conference of Bi-Net. This good fortune brings with it the need for planning further in advance of our events and more details to manage, but we seem to be adjusting without too much strife.

SBMU currently has a mailing list of 80+ men. This growth is sure to continue as bi events get more publicity, and as individual out bi's get more recognition for their work. We look forward to more joint efforts toward bisexual liberation, with ever-increasing numbers of men and women to help us along. With this issue of *North Bi Northwest* we introduce a combined calendar of SBMU and SBWN events, providing a more complete picture of all bi events in our area.

Recent SBMU topic nights have featured lively discussion of S&M, older

men in relationships with younger men, porno videos, and spirituality and bisexuality. Our social meetings included our Equinox/Drag ball/Potluck, where ben showed us what a little attention to detail (and a trip to Value Village) can do for a man's wardrobe. Our future plans are outlined in the new combined calendar, and include holiday festivities where we hope to see more lively, bisexual women!

For men not currently on our mailing list, and for women who want to know what we're up to, we proudly introduce Son of Bi-Phone, which you can call at 720-4506. This is our exclusive line, with answering machine. Give us a ring!

SBMU meets for topic nights the second Sunday of each month from 7-9 pm at Seattle Central Community College, portable B-107. Call us for directions and bus information.

Editor's Letter

Almost five years ago, Lenore Norrgard and I presented a plan to the women of SBWN, saying that we wanted to do a newsletter. "Go for it!" was the response, and we did. We've come a long way since the first issues that were printed out on my dot-matrix printer, laboriously cut and pasted together, and then laid out by Joan Hill.

For the next issue, we'd like your reveries and reminiscences on the past-years of *North Bi Northwest*, and SBWN. We'll be doing a retrospective, so sit down and tell us how you first came to a meeting, or upon a newsletter, and how it felt. What do you see now that you didn't see then, how has the group changed you, or how have you changed the group? What has having a bisexual women's group in town meant to you? Please send your thoughts in by November 1 to the SBWN post office box.

In closing, this issue of *North Bi Northwest* is the 29th I've edited, and I've decided to let go of the mouse and let others take it up. The work of editing *Closer to Home: Feminism and Bisexuality*, the book of essays which the Seal Press will publish this coming May, is a major effort, and it leaves me without the time to spend on the newsletter I'd like and that it deserves. It's time to move on and let some new folks have the fun.

One meeting of a possible newsletter committee has already taken place, but there's still plenty of time to get involved. If you're interested in putting together *North Bi Northwest*, if you'd like to write, edit, do production, contribute graphics, or generally help out, now's your chance. Give the bi-phone a call and we'll tell you when the next meeting is.



The Sweet Bi and Bi

continued from page 1

appropriate people who come our way, regardless of their sexual orientation. However, the presence of large bisexual communities in progressive urban areas like Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston makes it more likely that we are hanging out with "our kind" in the first place, and so have a greater chance of coupling with another bisexual than we would if we moved in predominantly gay or straight social circles. Such bisexual circles do not necessarily have to be organized groups with active political agendas. Often, we are part of loose networks of bisexual people who befriend each other and socialize informally. This environment tends to produce a large proportion of the bisexual couples that I have encountered. This is not to say that we never meet each other "out in the wilderness," but of course, it being the wilderness, the statistical chances of such meetings are slimmer.

Most couples deny that their main reason for being attracted to each other was that they were bisexual. "No," says Pata, a teacher and writer, "the first attraction was hormones." Peter, her partner, adds, "It's not a reason why I find her attractive. It's just a wonderful bonus, like finding that the other person likes your favorite bizarre food."

This "bonus" can definitely make a difference as a relationship continues. It can add flexibility and variety to public scoping and flirting, and facilitate sharing sexual fantasies (including acting them out — although most bi couples protest the prurient interest of straight society as to whether their partnership automatically enables them to "swing" and participate in threesomes). The common bisexual identity of Robin and Dave, who have lived together for a year, allows them to openly share and discuss hopes for an expanded family sometime in the future, when the right person comes along who can love them as much as they now love each other.

A bisexual in a monogamous relationship with a non-bi might have difficulty convincing her or his partner that s/he was not in danger of straying for



a taste of "the other side," but for Shani and Bob, a three-year couple who are committed to monogamy, the fact that they are both bisexual leaps this hurdle through shared experience.

As Pata points out, having shared reference points, including an understanding of romantic/erotic flexibility, can facilitate some of the serious discussions that come up as a relationship becomes and continues to be long-term.

Many bisexuals have an unconventional take on gender, and like being with a partner who can join in shattering sexual stereotypes. For Robin, bisexuality is a philosophy of life as much as a statement of attraction to both men and women. "I've really liked the concept of going for the person first. Gender certainly is an issue in people's personalities, but I don't think it's an absolute rule. I'm interested in androgyny as malleable roles—not abolishing roles, which is what most people associate androgyny with, but being able to exchange and having a trunkful of costumes that you can play with."

For someone like Grant, who was dating a bisexual woman when I interviewed him, an alternative view of gender could be as simple as merely wanting to be with a woman who was butch and strong and whom he didn't have to worry about squeezing too tight.

Pata says that she expects the same sensitivity of Peter as she expects from

her women friends, and their ability to get in touch with and talk about their feelings has definitely been beneficial over their nine-year relationship. "For a lot of straight guys, that's pretty high standards. We can make our relationships with men better by insisting on that."

Shani and Bob, who both had previous troubled marriages with heterosexual spouses, feel that their relationship has been a time of vast growth for them both. Shani says, "Finally I am beginning to be comfortable with the masculine side of myself. His femaleness complements that in me and feels really good." Bob agrees: "It feels really good for me to want to expose her to so-called butch things and to have her teach me what to do with my feminine side."

PDA's and Privilege

Heterosexual privilege is the subject of an ongoing discussion in the bisexual community. In large measure, we receive messages from political lesbian-feminists, and less often gay men, that we become somehow "less queer" when paired with a member of the opposite sex, because we can gain the privileges that come from "passing for straight." Many bisexuals agree with this analysis and refrain from public displays of affection with their opposite-sex partners, especially when in predominantly gay neighborhoods. By contrast, one couple I saw on Castro Street in San Francisco had their own way

of getting around this: they were holding hands, he and she, and he was wearing a T-shirt that said "I'm not a lesbian but my girlfriend is."

Pata says that she would rather spend her energy standing up beside her lesbian friends in support of their rights than spend it worrying about downplaying her connection with Peter. The couples I talked to did not believe that they were accepting inordinate privilege or oppressing gays and lesbians by participating in opposite-sex relationships. Bisexuals are following the gay movement's tenet of being true to our own self-determined sexuality. And although passers-by may take us to be straight, among people close to us, where it matters, we find it impossible or undesirable to lie about who we really are. We are not straight, wouldn't be able to be straight, and do not want to be considered straight.

As Shani points out, mainstream society is often not willing to accept a bisexual person back into the straight world just because they are in a heterosexual relationship. "[That kind of straight person says] 'you're gay and you're one of them and we don't want to have anything to do with you.'" In fact, if our families were to show considerable relief that we have settled down into a "conventional" opposite-sex relationship, many of us would go out of our way to convince them that the coming-out we may have gone through with them at some prior point is not nullified—that we are still proudly queer.

Many of us are doubtful about marriage, whether we came out of the heterosexual community, with all of its expectations of marriage and conventional behavior resting sour in our mouths, or whether we came out of the lesbian community and share its critical view of marriage as a sexist institution. There are as many different ways among bisexuals of dealing with our long-term partnerships as there are different couples.

Some couples marry for the pragmatic financial benefits that they believe should be equally extended to gays and lesbians, but at the same time they make a

point of not appearing "married," in order to avoid being pigeonholed into an image of an "acceptable" lifestyle that does not fit them. They may refer to their spouse as their "partner," rather than "husband" or "wife," causing listeners to wonder not only about their marital status, but also about the gender of their partner.

Pata and Peter, who were married in an extremely small, private ceremony, even find in their status a way to challenge heterosexual privilege. Revealing that they are married when they provide AIDS education and pro-gay curricula in the public schools allows them to have a hearing among potentially homophobic listeners who get caught with their guard down. By contrast, some couples might have non-legal bonding ceremonies, just as gays and lesbians may, in order to affirm their commitment before their community and loved ones, while still making a point that marriage as an institution is unfairly limited to only a portion of the people who may validly seek it. And for some couples, the bonding that takes place in private between the two of them is enough, and they see no need at all for bureaucratic recognition or public ceremony.

After meeting and talking with these people and others, I realized that I was conservative by comparison when I stood up in front of ninety people and took legal vows with my partner—even though the ceremony was feminist, strongly pagan-influenced, and I wore red in my costume! I felt the binds of this situation in the weeks immediately following the wedding. I realized that many people were seeing me as "a married woman," different from the woman I had been the day before, and was angry because I felt that they weren't seeing me anymore. If I had encountered other bisexual couples back then, as I have now, I might have chosen a different form to express my commitment.

For bisexual couples who do marry, marriage is not necessarily correlated with monogamy. Shani and Bob, who see no reason why they would ever want to get married, believe in being lovers exclusively with each other, because both of

them value that kind of bond. Pata and Peter are strongly, primarily committed to each other in the long term, but there is room in their marriage for other, shorter-term connections that either of them might form individually. For over a year, my own marriage has been open to non-monogamy, and both of us have formed various other relationships, including one apiece that feels like it could be as "primary" for each of us as we have been for each other.

Some couples even envision themselves as part of an existing or potential extended family. As Robin points out, this is rare and difficult, because it requires high standards—not only that the added person/s be as loved as is one's partner, but also that she/he/they love both partners enough to make that kind of commitment.

Freedom of Choice All The Way

If there are bisexual couples who present an appearance of the traditional suburban nuclear family (I have not met any, but I'm sure they must exist) it is probably the case that they live that way because they've realized that it just isn't right for them to act unconventionally. The only thing that bisexual couples have in common among themselves is the fact that every coupling is a completely unique and individual situation. How they met, what they find attractive in each other, how they deal with public expressions of their bond, and whether or not they marry, are all decided by the people involved. This makes a lot of sense. One trait I've seen again and again in bisexuals is our strong commitment to doing what we feel is right, what we believe in, instead of what we are told to do—whether we are rejecting mainstream heterosexual acceptability or passing up the politically correct behaviors that progressive people are "supposed" to emulate. We bring this commitment to autonomy and diversity with us to our relationships. When we are in a relationship with another bisexual person, then, how much greater an opportunity there is for self-determination and freedom of choice all the way

Seattle Area Bi Calender

Please note that topics can be tentative. Call the Women's Bi-Phone (SBWN) at 783-7987 or the Men's Bi-Phone (SBMU) at 720-4506 for further information

October 5 SBWN Garage Sale

October 11 National Coming Out Day
March 4:30pm Call SBMU for details.

October 12 Polyfidelity Potluck. Call the LRC at 322-DYKE for details

October 13 Curious Forum with Queer Nation etc. 3:00-5:00 pm. Call SBMU for info.

SBWN topic meeting: Intimacy
6:00 pm

October 23 Women's Reproductive Health Care Forum 6:30-9pm. Call NOW office at 632-8547

October 26 Halloween Dance at Pilgrim Congregational Church, co-sponsored by Queer Nation, SBMU. Call SBMU for info.

October 27 SBWN Check-in meeting: Elections 6:00 pm

November 9 Polyfidelity Potluck. Call the LRC at 322-DYKE for details.

November 9 Chicken Soup Brigade Marathon Dance Benefit. Noon to Midnight, raise money against AIDS. Call 206-322-CARE for info.

November 10 SBWN meeting: Media night 6:00-9:00 pm (long meeting)

Regular SBMU meeting: Gender Conceptualization

November 24 Thanksgiving Potluck, not vegetarian. Home of Paul Talbert. Call SBMU for details.

SBWN Check-in meeting 6:00 pm

December 8 SBWN topic meeting: Holidays, Family Stuff

SBMU meeting: Incest and Survival Issues

December 14 Polyfidelity Potluck

December 21 Holiday Potluck (Vegetarian) at Jim Benson's house. Call SBMU for info.

December 22 Solstice Party. Call the BiPhones for venue

NGLTF asked to include bi's

by Erica Avery

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will be holding its Creating Change/ Training Conference November 8-11, 1991. This spring Bisexual organizers sent a letter asking the task force to not only schedule a formal bi caucus as part of their caucus line-up, but to also schedule a workshop session on biphobia and to integrate the expertise of bisexual activists into the presentations of many of the other workshops they are scheduling.

The letter was followed up with lobbying, and bi activist Lani Kaahumanu sent the conference programmer a list of names of bi activists with addresses and

biographical/expertise areas attached. "Yet," says Loraine Hutchins of BiNet USA, "at early registration and workshops presenter deadline time, when I checked with NGLTF staff, I found out that almost none of our list had been contacted as presenters, nor had anyone been sent registration material. (The attitude is that we were 'only' bi activists and that they didn't know how to use us otherwise.)"

Loraine is now asking everyone to immediately contact the NGLTF saying who you recommend to present a workshop and why. Please let Loraine know about any contact you make. Inclusion in

this conference is a step in fighting bisexual invisibility, and whatever progress is made this year will provide more ground to build upon for next year.

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